

RAMBO AND THE ROTTWEILER BY ALEXANDER TSYPKIN
Translated by Paul Lazarus

Recently I saw four poodle puppies (the dog walker barely had the Napoleonic quad on a leash) madly yapping at a huge Rottweiler. It's the only time in my life I can remember a look of total confusion on a big dog's face. If a dog can go blank- this was what was happening.

Somewhere inside this cur's brain a thought was taking shape, that he needed to put this quartet in their place - all four could have easily fit in his mouth - but in this situation, no response is often a wiser decision. The Rottweiler tailed behind his master while the musketeers continued to squeal proudly, and took turns marking a Mercedes S-Class wheel. Well, the bottom of the wheel. The non-plussed dog reminded me of another member of his breed and a story about respecting your elders in the canine world.

Back in the 90s, my friend Vitya, who we nicknamed Sylvester - don't ask, had a dog he called Rambo (stress on the first syllable). However, this pooch had the qualities of the disturbed Viet Nam Vet about as much as the famous French poet (stress on the last syllable). A mature mutt about the size of a spaniel, with a look that was sad, brave and cunning all at the same time. I once saw eyes like that on a lifer who had already done ten years. Fate put us on opposite sides of the bars in the same jail.

Like the prisoner I had faced, Rambo was top dog. He walked free - off his leash - sometimes dug up the back yard looking for misplaced bones, and of course, became an utter softy when Mom paid any attention to him - Sylvester's mom, of course. Dogs always know who the real boss of the house is. Apart from Rambo, there was also a cat in the house. Rambo did not exist to the cat - what do you want from a feline named Cunnegonde? The household menagerie lived in complete harmony until one fateful day.

A baby Rottweiler was brought to the apartment with a big to-do. The name of this little aristocrat was powerful and scary - Jafar. Jafar's position in society was the exact opposite of his illustrious name. The hierarchy of the animal kingdom in this apartment was: the cat, the mutt, flies, mosquitoes, Jafar. He ate last and slept where he was allowed. Rambo, when so moved, gave Jafar a tired, "been there, done that" look, the cat took no notice of him at all. Needless to say, the Rottweiler pup understood his place, and when my friend tossed him a piece of juicy sausage, swallowing drool with tears, he sat near the temptation and waited for Rambo to come and eat his part... or everything. Depending totally on luck and Rambo's pleasure.